CHILD OF THE PAPER HOUSE

By Pauline Carrington Bouvé

IT has been acknowledged in the western world of art that in design and color Japanese art is superior to the art of all the other countries of the Orient, as well as that of Europe. The Japanese are artists by instinct as well as education, and this instinct is the result, to a certain extent, of the influences that surround a Japanese child from its infancy.

The Japanese mother considers the clothing of her child a matter of very serious importance, and when the baby is born favored friends and neighbors are invited to discuss the scheme of decoration for the tiny kimonos that baby is to wear. If baby's parents happen to be persons of wealth and importance, enormous sums are spent upon the silk crape and other rich fabrics that are to be fashioned into gorgeous gowns and rainbow sashes (*obi*).

Japanese Children Playing the "Kotoro" Game

When the idea of decorations has been decided upon, the designs are placed in the hands of some famous artist who makes water-color drawings of them upon the silk and then turns them over to a stencil cutter, who after carrying them through an elaborate course hands them back to the artist, who retouches them. Then if baby's parents are very rich the stencils are destroyed and the tiny garment becomes a unique work. No other baby in all Japan will have a kimono of the same design.

Art and poetry enter into the decoration of these radiant little frocks, in which the mother's artistic feelings are unconsciously expressed. If baby comes in the month of cherry bloom, then the cherry blossom will be the scheme, the idea, of the dainty dress; or perhaps, if it comes in winter, snow-white and the sunrise flash will be the coloring of the gown. But there always is a poetic thought in the design, and the Japanese baby from its earliest consciousness has an artistic setting about it. It is generations of such environment that have produced the instinctive art of Japan.

In the springtime Europeans are much surprised sometimes to find the private houses deserted and all of the shops and places of business closed. Upon inquiry he will find that every Jap, big and little, has gone to "view the cherry bloom" or "the peach bloom" or the "plum bloom," as the case may be, and the love of flowers and color is fostered quite naturally and without the least bit of that "art education" jargon that is so often talked of in American schools. With all the beauty and fragrance and naturalness around him, and with the gentleness that is a part of the nature of these curious little people, enveloping him as softly as the loose folds of his silk and crape garments, it is no wonder that Japanese babies rarely cry. Mrs. Aytoun thinks that this is because there are no beds or chairs or awkward pieces of furniture to stumble over, no stairs to climb up or "fall down"; nothing whatever to imperil his own sweet way over the soft grass mats that cover the floor.

The Traveling Shrine of Jizo, the God of Dead Children

But there are many other things besides this lack of house-furnishing obstructions that combine to make the child of the "Paper House" the happiest child in the world. One reason is that the Japanese are childlike themselves. From the beginning they have been taught obedience to superiors, and they teach the same lesson to their children with sweet gentleness and patience. The little children in this far-off country learn first of all to be polite, and American children would be much surprised to see what dignified and elegant manners these shaven-pated, long-sleeved, little, brown men and women have; how they bow so low when their guests leave that their heads quite touch the mat-covered floor as they lisp "*Sayanara*," the beautiful Japanese "good-by." But then, there is never any danger of getting their faces or hands or clothes dirty on floors that are kept as clean as our dining tables.

On winter nights when the streets are dark the children gather around the charcoal fire that burns in a metal pan instead of in a chimney, and there with a wadded blanket or quilt drawn close around them, much as the children of other countries do, listen to the stories their mothers and fathers tell them of demons, fairies and great heroes. Then there are games of chess, checkers, backgammon and cards, some too, that teach them poetry and geography and history and proverbs, besides a great many puzzles that are interesting. In these puzzle-games, if a boy loses he must submit to having his face inked; if a girl is so unfortunate she has a wisp of straw stuck in her back hair. In this pleasant way the winter evenings are passed, all the little family sipping hot tea, meantime, in order to keep warm, for the pan of charcoal isn't quite so good on cold nights as our unromantic American furnaces and steam radiators. Some of the games are like those played in Europe and America, such as "Hop Scotch" and walking on stilts, which they poetically call "Heron Legs," and making snow men, and playing at snowball. The *kotoro* is a favorite game: a line of boys stand holding onto each other, the biggest boy at one end, the smallest at the other. There is also a catcher whose business it is to catch any child who leaves his place. This, however, the boy at the head of the line must prevent.

The *kangura* or "Korean Lion" is another highly esteemed game. This is played with grotesque masks over the head and upper part of the body; and the maskers are sometimes very clever in their disguises.

Little and young girls are very fond of the flower card game. Cards of all sorts indeed form a large proportion of childish games, and the long sleeve of the gay little kimono is usually a receptacle for one or more packs. Every child in Japan may be said to have "a card up his sleeve" in fact.

In the summer evenings everybody stays out of doors as much as possible, and the streets are made gay with festoons of colored lanterns stretched across from one side to the other, with the moonlight bathing the queer little gardens, with their miniature bridges and lakes and lantern-lighted tea houses, in its pale light, and making altogether a strange and beautiful picture.

But the chattering about the streets does not last long, for the Japanese people, grown-up as well as the little folks, are sensible and go to bed early, and long before midnight the little houses are shut up like so many boxes. It is the custom to close the wooden slides that protect the oil-paper windows and to draw to the paper screens that let in the light and separate the house into different apartments. Then the "Honored Interior," as the mother is called, the father and all of the family spread themselves on the mats that serve as beds, and with scooped-in, wooden pillows under their heads and padded quilts and blankets over them sleep just as comfortably, no doubt, as we do on our spring mattresses and feather pillows. If it happens to be springtime the little girls are likely to dream of the *hina-matsuri* or "Doll's Show," which is their own fête day.

A pretty and interesting festival this is. The *hina-matsuri* is held on the third day of March, which is the one day in the year when the Japanese boy is quite "out of the game" and must be contented to let his patient little sister, who has to be quite submissive to him during the other three hundred and sixty-four, be the important personage in the house. *Hina* means doll and *matsuri* is the Japanese word for show or festival, and on this day of the doll show—the *hina-matsuri*—all the dolls that the little girls possess in every home in Japan are brought forward and made to play prominent parts.

Child Acrobats of the Street

Sometimes a little Japanese girl will have inherited dolls that have been the treasures of a good many great-great-grandmothers and are very costly. These dolls represent the emperor and empress, the courtiers and various court personages, and the little girls offer them tiny cups of tea, sweet cakes, rice *sake* and other delicacies that royalty would be likely to enjoy. All this is done according to the strictest rules of etiquette, and in this way the grace and elegant manners of court ceremonials are taught to the small, scarlet-petticoated individuals, who are in quite as much of a flutter in their little hearts as though the dollies were really the august personages they represent. There is a doll god, too, who takes care of the broken dolls and whose name is *Kojine*.

Two months later comes another great day for the children—the "Feast of Flags." Now it is the boys' time to be as happy as it is possible for a boy to be. This festival is held on the fifth day of May, when in every city and town and village one may see gaily painted paper fishes hung up before the doors of many of the houses. These paper-fish flags are called